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ABSTRACT

Begun in 1979, the Waterways Project, which provides literary arts program experience for at risk students in New York City, is described in this paper. The Waterways Project was started as a service organization for small press publishers and writers. The paper recounts the project's involvement in book fairs, computer programming, a literary arts publishing program, and adult poetry workshops. The director of the project relates of several students' experiences with individualized lessons at the computer. The paper also describes the project's clientele, i.e., students with drug problems, high school dropouts, and youths in transition. The goal of the project is identified in the paper as giving students the encouragement to try to have their work published, which is intended to give them direction. An appendix containing the project's history concludes the paper. (MS)

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Computers and the Waterways' Project

Richard A. Spiegel

As co-directors, since 1979, of the Waterways Project, a literary arts publishing program, Barbara Fisher and I have motivated student writers and arranged poetry readings with professional poets. We have also edited, designed, printed, collated and distributed more than 250 literary magazines. I am presently at work on a curriculum for use with our two annual anthologies, Streams and Streams II. All aspects of our program have involved computers and technologies.

Our student writers are "at risk" Black, Hispanic, Chinese and White New Yorkers attending Alternative Programs and Special Education classes in sites such as Odyssey House, Daytop, Phoenix House, YWCA Teen Parents, P.R.A.C.A. and Riker's Island Jail. We are also working with mainstream and E.S.L. students at the High School for the Humanities, where we are setting up a production center.

The students were given lessons in literary form and encouraged to express themselves freely using Bank Street Writer, Friendly Writer, Word Writer, Apple Write and Mac Write word processing programs. Students also used Mac Paint, Print Master and Print Shop programs to create graphics. Barbara and I used an IBM Quiet Writer 8, a Minolta EP470Z, an Atari 1040 ST (with Publishing Partner and Degas software) and a Hewlett Packard LaserJet series II to design and publish the students' literary publications.

We have worked directly with students at twelve different sites during the school year. I have trained teachers at Offsite Educational Services' programs and statewide conferences. All student writings from a site are published in magazines designed for that specific site. The students use computers to create poetry, correspondences, fiction, nonfiction and graphic art. At the end of the year a perfect bound annual, Streams, is compiled of the best student writing from individual literary magazines, and includes selected submissions from other sites, under the auspices of O.E.S.

The Waterways Project began in 1979, with a seeding grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, as a service organization for small press publishers and writers. The project has regularly exhibited at the annual New York Book Fair, where Barbara and I served seven years as fiscal director and small press poetry coordinator, respectively. For 1989, we are organizing a mini-book fair so students can present their publications, alongside professional small press publishers at the High School for the Humanities.

It rained on July Fourth, when we held our first book fair at the South Street Seaport in 1979. Literary presses from throughout the state set up their displays on tables under umbrellas in front of Bowne & Co.'s museum of printing. Poets,

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from participating presses, were present to read their work and Waterways printed a commemorative anthology representing all the poets present.

We organized weekly fairs for the next two years, visiting waterfront sites in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, Kingston, Albany and Long Island. We used a Kelsey hand letterpress and a local xerography printer to produce the Waterways magazine, which was originally a record of the poets who read at the fairs. We continued to publish Waterways:Poetry in the Mainstream using the letter press and an IBM photocopier we purchased, even after we stopped doing weekly fairs.

1980 and '81, Waterways was invited to give workshops for students at Bowne & Co.'s printing museum, Hunter College Elementary School, a local school district in Canarsie and the Jefferson Market Library. As a result of the workshops, each site had its own poetry publication. The participating students were invited to read their poetry at New York University for the annual New York Book Fair. At the same time, Con Edison and the MTA assisted the Waterways Project in the publication of Subway Slams, an anthology of student writing about the subways, and a poetry reading event held in the subway station under the main branch of the New York Public Library and broadcast over WNYC.

In 1982, Vita Bogart, Director of Citywide Programs for the N.Y.C. Board of Education, invited Waterways to do programming for those students attending classes at Sloan Kettering, the Hospital for Special Surgery, N.Y.S. Psychiatric Institute, Payne Whitney, Karen Marsh Alternative to Detention, Overlook Pregnancy Program, Pyramid House, L.U.C.H.A. and Harlem Teams. As a result of our work with hospitals and homebound students, we developed a proposal to use computers as a way to network between students isolated in programs and those in regular schools throughout the city.

In 1985, Stephen Phillips, Dr. Marcia Shelton-Brevot and Richard Organisciak invited the Waterways Project to establish a literary arts publishing program in the Division of Alternative H.S. Programs and specifically at O.E.S. This coincided with the recent purchase by O.E.S. of Commodore 128 computers. Since 1986 the program has been receiving its funding from the New York City Board of Education, New York State Council on the Arts, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and Con Edison.

I had been assigned to visit every week with ten different sites throughout Manhattan. Since many of the site teachers were not computer literate, I was the only teacher at those sites capable of giving the students any computer instruction and frequently set up the computers at the sites. As a result, I travelled from site to site with a disk of the Bank Street Writer and student data disks. By the end of the year I had become a living electronic bulletin board carrying pen pal letters back and forth.

Historically, poetry began as a spoken message created by

"inspired" poets. With clay tablets, papyrus and paper memory, came the technology of the written word. The Gilgamesh epic, the earliest "written poem" was codified in Cuneiform. The Waterways Project presented the same epic this year to students at the Austin H. McCormick Island Academy, Bronx Daytop and Manhattan Phoenix House in booklets designed with a computer and printed on a photocopier.

Oral poetry today is often created by high school students as songs and raps. We have sponsored Louis Reyes Rivera, a poet, to perform the art of the spoken word for the students at the Puerto Rican Association for Community Affairs, Odyssey House, the Educational Alliance's Project Contact, Veritas, the Jefferson Market Library and the high school on Riker's Island. His visit helped to motivate the bilingual population and resulted in a greater interest on the part of our students to seriously study and create their own poetry.

Students turned to computers to both record and create their poetry. Though some students worked on their writing before approaching the machine others came to the computer to work with words on the monitor. As they created, these students began to master word processing. Kenneth, who came to Odyssey from Covenant House used the computer to create a concrete poem, which used the word as visual art. Mel Cohen, who worked this year with Waterways, taught students to create poetry, stories and music using computers. We plan to continue working with students to create music and animation and explore telecommunications. Toward these ends we have acquired an Amiga 2000 and have opened a SIG on NYCENET, the Board of Education's electronic bulletin board.

Within the framework of a structured classroom assignment, the essence of our program has been individualized lessons. Our Special Education background has prepared us for this way of working with students. Teachers will spend time sitting with individual students at their computers. Their goal is to facilitate student writing, whether it be prose fiction, nonfiction or poetry, moving slowly, getting the poem the story, the statement from the student.

Misael was a special education student on Riker's Island with a third grade reading level. I began working with him on a Tandy Computer, using the Friendly Writer word processing program, and exploring his vocabulary. He began by composing a list of words relating to his personal experiences at Coney Island. We moved from there to imaginative stories and poems. This material, later became helpful during an Educational Planning Conference where the Educational Evaluator had found Misael only capable of expressing himself in profane street language.

I worked in a similar fashion with another adolescent inmate, Dewayne, on a Macintosh Plus using Mac Write. He began by listing words relevant to his home neighborhood, South Jamaica. From the word list he developed sentences and then from the

sentences a series of neighborhood vignettes. In one vignette, he began by describing a homeless man who lived by an abandoned house and then used flashback techniques to tell the story of the woman whose home it was and the night of the fire when she was burned out and offered assistance by his mother.

Another student, Ray, at Odyssey House began a story using Word Writer on a Commodore 128. He wrote about a neighborhood incident in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn. As he was writing he found himself getting too emotionally involved with the personal elements of his tale. I saved what he wrote until he was ready to return to it. After completing the story the piece was published in Streams II, and won first prize for fiction and a $100 savings bond in the annual O.E.S. writing contest. Later that year, Ray pursued his writing to the point of winning a scholarship to study with the New Youth Connections over the summer.

The computer has changed the teaching of creative writing. The writer becomes a sculptor of thought. I encourage the students to write down all their thoughts without thinking about what it is they are saying. As they do so, they begin to master the mechanics of the machine and the word processing program. The raw block of thought becomes the sculptor's stone. Editing becomes central to the creative process. The writer decides what to keep and what to delete. And what is the shape that resides in the raw stone of thought.

First, Misael spoke his story as I typed it on the computer. His writing and reading skills were nil, but he looked on as I wrote. Together, we read the story on the monitor. I printed a copy for him, which he took back to the dorm to share with friends. On the next day we met, he pointed to changes in the text, which he wanted me to help him make. As his story grows we break it into chapters, he names each chapter, and we continue to develop the work.

Veronica, a student at Odyssey House, wrote a long prose letter. I sat down beside her and helped her rework the piece as a poem, by isolating and clarifying phrases as poetic lines. I approached these lines as breaths of speech in the spirit of W.C. Williams. As I helped her to rewrite, I strove for more grammatical clarity, without destroying her style or "voice".

For the teacher of creative writing, the computer is a fine tool. When the teacher sits down individually beside the pupil, it is possible to share a screen, when it was impossible to read a page over the student's shoulder. Built in "spellcheckers" and thesauri are valuable. They were too slow on the commodore 128, but worked well on the IBM and Tandy machines, especially with the Friendly Writer.

For the past eight years the Waterways Project has been conducting adult poetry workshops at the Jefferson Market Branch of the New York Public Library. These workshop/discussion groups have dealt with the History of American Literary Magazines, Ballads, Sonnets, Bohemian Poets and Poets of the WPA. Much of

the material has been presented to the students using the technology of desktop publishing. When the library acquired an Apple IIgs, it was incorporated into the workshops, although with a degree of reluctance by some of the students. Others were intrigued by the possibilities of the machine and we used it to create small one line poetry chapbooks, using the greeting card aspect of "Print Shop." With the machine present, I was also able to quickly type comments from the group and organize them into poems which were printed and passed around.

Students with drug problems make up a large percentage of the O.E.S. population. Substance abuse is widespread in contemporary American society. In therapeutic centers students are encouraged to verbalize their predicament. This allows them to approach the computer as a tool to help verbalize their emotional concerns. The student writing is published in a limited edition to share with their peers in the therapeutic community. The students' identities remain confidential since only their first or nicknames are used.

High school dropouts, or youths in transition attending classes in community centers like the Puerto Rican Association for Community Assistance, the Greenwich Village Youth Council, the Y.W.C.A. Teen Parent Program and transition schools for youth in hotels for the homeless, such as the Martinique, have also been served by the Waterways Project. The literary magazines from these sites include poems, stories, essays and correspondences between these students in small programs and the larger community. The correspondence became for these students a "nonthreatening" means of meeting other adolescents. One series of letters carried back and forth on a computer disk resulted in a 1987 publication entitled, "Penpals."

In the Autumn of 1987, Waterways began to work with the sentenced adolescent male inmates on Riker's Island. In 1988-9, Waterways intends to work with both male and female adolescent inmates and possibly with adult work-release prisoners. The adolescents, in prison for drug dealing, robbery, weapons possession, assault and similar charges, reach out from their situation and build bridges to students who are serious about their studies and progressing toward college careers. The correspondences are monitored by the fact they are published in their literary magazine. Since much of this adolescent population is learning disabled, the pen pal activity forces the students to use and pay attention to developing their writing skills. One student who claimed he could not write well enough for the Regent's Competency Writing Test wound up writing a novel and conducting a lengthy correspondence.

The students are aware that the goal of their writing is publication. This gives these "at risk" students direction. The computers are a tool that made the goal feasible. As teachers we watched over all the steps toward the goal. Our own three year goal is to involve more students in all the steps of writing,

editing and production. Four sites, (P.R.A.C.A., Daytop, Odyssey House and Contact) published their own publications this year, using the Commodore 128, an Epson printer, "Word Writer", "Print Shop" and "Newsroom" software, and a photocopier. Next year we will be setting up three centers for production and will have access to IBMs, Macintoshes, and Minoltas. Barbara Fisher, whose background is in fine press printing, will work with students at production sites.

Throughout the year, we have used our computers to generate learning materials. The student magazines are one example. Our republication of classic poetry, such as the "Gilgamesh Epic", "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", "The Ballad of Reading Gaol", "The Hunting of the Snark" and "Goblin Market" provides students with hands on training in our literary heritage. Although computers and technologies have replaced the letter press of two hundred ago, the art of the word and the freedom to present it remain with us.

THE WATERWAYS PROJECT
799 Greenwich Street #4S NYNY 10014 212 929 3169

Barbara Fisher & Richard Alan Spiegel - Co-Directors August 15, 1988

WATERWAYS PROJECT RECEIVES RENEWED SUPPORT FROM THE STATE
Computer Based Literary Arts Publishing Program to Expand Project

The Waterways Project of Ten Penny Players Inc. is pleased to announce that the New York State Council on the Arts at its August 9, 1988 meeting elected to give the program multi-year support. The three-year expansion of the Waterways Arts in Education collaboration with Alternative High Schools & Programs was designed by Richard Spiegel, Dr. Marcia Shelton-Brevot, and Barbara Fisher in consultation with Stephen Phillips and Principals Norma Green, Joan Jarvis and Richard Organisciak.

The program in the last two years received funding from the Council, the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, Con Edison and the New York City Board of Education. More than 50 magazines were published from the participating program and school sites; two perfect bound anthologies of student writings were created; curricula was developed; inservice workshops for teachers gave professionals information and encouragement in developing other publishing experiences for the students; presentations were made at statewide conferences; performances of poetry were given by student writers and guest professionals; installation of telephone modems at some of the program sites afforded the students the opportunity of communicating with others through the Board of Ed's NYCENET.

Plans for the 1988-1989 school year include: creation of a computer based literary arts publishing center at HS for the Humanities which will involve students from that school, and students attending OffSite Educational Services Sites who will serve as interns and participants in workshops; a spring literary arts publishers fair at Humanities to include literary magazines from every High School that wishes to participate; exhibits by professional nonprofit poetry and literary NYC publishers; readings by student and professional writers;entrepreneurship programs with students from OESand other Alternative HS & Programs sites;

expansion of WATERWAYS service sites to include among others: Eastern Facility on Rikers Island, Educational Learning Centers in hotels, the Streetworks Project; the newly developed work-release project; Liberty School; The Door; a literacy program at the half-way house for students exiting Rikers' Island which is being negotiated; South Bronx Job Corps; the pilot alternatives to detention program under development and others to be designed. WATERWAYS will continue to work with Odyssey House, Phoenix House, Bronx Daytop, YWCA Teen Parent Program, Island Academy and Samaritan Village-Ellenville.

The Waterways Project has been providing literary arts program experiences to at risk students since 1981 when we began doing projects with children enrolled in Citywide Program classes. Since that time we have published students in almost 200 separate magazines and chapbooks and have often published New York City students in the more than 110 issues of WATERWAYS:Poetry in the Mainstream [our professional publication] that appears 11 times a year.

The teachers who have volunteered to work with this program are artists and writers committed to using hands on computer literary arts experiences as one path towards achieving literacy and empowerment for our students. Several are Special Education licensed; all are skilled in one-on-one teaching techniques. Many of the programs with which Waterways will be working have been created through practical collaborations of many government agencies and the private sector. For example, the halfway house project for youths leaving Rikers results from work of the Alternative High Schools & Programs Superintendency, the staff at Island Academy and of the Vocational Training Center, Waterways, The Rockefeller Group, South Bronx Community Development Corporation, NYC Department of Buildings and Division of Real Property, and the Friends of Island Academy [among others - the Mayor's Office, Correction Association, Daytop Village, Hale HOuse, U.F.T., Vocational Foundation, Fortune Society, NYC Department of Correction].

Until recently 'aging out' meant that after 21 Board of Education supports and entitlements were withdrawn and students left to fend for themselves. More realistic understanding of longterm educational and training needs of our at risk students has allowed for the development of open-ended programs where involvement in education becomes a birth to death commitment.

THe New York State COuncil on the Arts and the New York State Education Department which must approve each arts project before funding is appropriated are demonstrating to the country that the Eastern Region is serious about literacy and that access to a 'free and appropriate education' includes our most at risk and fragile populations, the youths served by the Waterways Project and the Alternative High Schools &Programs.